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Normal Reconnaissance

It is safe to say that the U-2 bagged by the Communists in China is not the first reconnaissance plane to overfly territory held by the Red forces. It is equally safe to say that the planes used on previous flights probably were American made. The element of novelty in the situation involves only the kind of plane that has been destroyed. This does not seem to much alter the situation, legally, militarily or politically.

There would be no furore at all over this incident, if the sale of the two U-2 aircraft in 1960 had been disclosed. When the export license for the two Lockheed planes was issued, the fact should have been divulged. There is no reason why the aircraft should not have been sold; and no reason why they should not have been used.

The situation existing between the two Chinese regimes is one of war—civil or international—as the case may be. In these conditions, reconnaissance flights are standard operating procedure and invested with none of the reproach attached to deliberate flights in violation of prior commitments and normal peacetime practice. It is to be hoped that the flights were productive of useful information—of the kind that reassured the world on the defensive character of the recent Communist build-up opposite Quemoy and Matsu. If nothing worse than reconnaissance flights of unarmed planes disturbs the peace of the Far East it will be fortunate.

The U-2 From Taiwan

Communist China is predictably making as much propaganda as possible out of the downed Chinese Nationalist U-2 plane that had been on a reconnaissance flight over the China mainland. And by assembling a publicity package about the U-2 being part of a large-scale American espionage operation against Communist China directed from Tokyo, the Chinese Reds obviously are playing on Japanese sensitivities to American cold-war operations from bases in Japan.

Peiping's cries of scandal over the U-2 episode sound a hollow note. The Chinese Communists make their own reconnaissance flights over foreign territory when it suits their needs. New Delhi has protested such flights over northern India a number of times. Peiping's allies, the Russians, make regular air mapping missions over Japan and have also been over Alaska.

The Chinese Nationalists and Communists are still at war, subdued though their conflict may sometimes be. The Nationalists of course seek information on Communist military activities through air reconnaissance, just as the Communists do all they can to prevent such air missions. The most significant aspect of the latest U-2 incident, therefore, is not that the flight took place, but that the Chinese Communists brought it down, if that is what they did. A Peiping official says the intruding aircraft was hit "by unconventional means." This statement leaves wide room for speculation; but it could mean that the Chinese Communists have acquired an important new capability against high-flying planes.

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